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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1556
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/USDOJ WASHDC PRIORITY
RULSDMK/USDOT WASHDC PRIORITY
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FAS/ITP FOR SCHROETER; PACOM HONOLULU FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR;
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 02/06/08

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- (1) Editorial - Assistance to Afghanistan: Time to reconsider new framework

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)
February 6, 2008

The situation in Afghanistan makes us harbor concern that there may be a repeat of Iraq's failure. The security situation in that country in particular is worsening. In January, the only luxury hotel in the capital Kabul where the Norwegian foreign minister was then staying came under a terrorist attack, which led to a gunfight. In the southern region of Afghanistan, the vice governor was killed by a suicide bomber. Both incidents have left us with the impression that the Taliban is growing more powerful.

Over three years have passed since the Karzai government was inaugurated, but the Afghan national army has yet to stand on its own feet. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), a military campaign led by the United States, is still working to mop up the Taliban, while the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a team composed of troops from 38 countries centering on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), has contributed to maintaining public order in the country.

However, the efforts by the ISAF seem insufficient, given that combat with the Taliban is escalating particularly in the southern part of the country. Countries that have sent troops to the ISAF have seen some of their troops' lives sacrificed in security operations one after the other. The United States asked NATO members to send more troops, but no country responded. President Bush was eventually forced to make up his mind to send 3,200 more American troops to Afghanistan.

It is hard to say that the war on terrorism in Afghanistan and the reconstruction of that country are going smoothly. At a time like this, an international conference of countries wishing to assist the reconstruction of Afghanistan has begun in Tokyo. Thirteen Afghan cabinet members, including Foreign Minister Spanta, are attending the conference. We think it is a good opportunity to discuss ways to

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rebuild Afghanistan and obtain more international assistance.

Japan, as the host nation of the upcoming Group of Eight Summit in Lake Toya, Hokkaido, in July, has taken on the task of managing international efforts like this for Afghanistan.

It is time to reconsider the current framework for assistance to Afghanistan, including the area of public law and order in that country. Now that the current assistance framework has run into a brick wall, the situation in that country is unlikely to be resolved by military strength alone.

The Taliban is not a group of a single nature. Some of the Taliban are radicals who are plotting international terrorist acts, while others are moderate. There are calls in the Karzai government and European countries for exploring ways to have a dialogue with the moderates.

Who is the real enemy? How can military operations and assistance be combined to the benefit of the daily lives of the Afghan people? And which country will play what role? The international community needs to revamp the current framework. A new framework should be created in a way that lets the United Nations take the lead.

Taking advantage of the ongoing international conference, Japan must demonstrate its leadership to deepen fundamental discussions. It also should link the outcome of discussion at the conference to talks at the upcoming G8 Toyako Summit and use it as the starting point for peace building in Afghanistan.

To our regret, however, the Japanese government and lawmakers appear less interested in Afghan issues ever since Japan decided to resume its Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) refueling mission in the Indian Ocean.

At the conference, Foreign Minister Koumura reported on Japan's resumption of the refueling mission in the Indian Ocean and declared that Japan would offer 110 million dollars more aid to Afghanistan. Apparently, the foreign minister, by so saying, tried to underscore that Japan remains at the battle line, but he seemed to lack the enthusiasm to lead debate in order to break the impasse in

reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan.

Although Prime Minister Fukuda has declared that Japan would become a state contributing to peace-building, that sort of message has not yet been transmitted sufficiently to the international audience.

(2) Iwakuni mayoral election: Focus on U.S. jet redeployment

AKAHATA (Page 3) (Full)
February 6, 2008

If local people say nothing, Iwakuni will become the biggest of all U.S. air stations in Asia... On Feb. 10, the city of Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture will elect its new mayor. In the meantime, the Japanese and U.S. governments are pushing their planned redeployment of U.S. carrier-borne fighter jets to the U.S. Marine Corps' Iwakuni Air Station in the process of realigning U.S. forces in Japan. This has now become "the biggest point at issue" in campaigning for the election, according to former Iwakuni Mayor Katsusuke Ihara. Two years ago, Iwakuni polled its residents on this issue. In that local referendum, the city's population voted down the proposed

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redeployment of U.S. carrier-borne fighter jets to the Iwakuni base. The mayoral election has now become a dead heat between Ihara, who is saying "no" to the U.S. jet transfer for the sake of local residents, and a pro-redeployment candidate who was a House of Representatives member of the Liberal Democratic Party.

"They will come. Some people may say things like this. But if we easily accept them, we can't tell them to go home even if the actual noise is hard to stand. We will have to stand it for decades. Then, who is to blame for that?" With this, Ihara strongly warned of the redeployment of U.S. carrier-borne fighter jets to the Iwakuni base. He may well say so. If Iwakuni City accepts the government's realignment plan, the city will become the biggest of all U.S. airbases in Asia, outstripping the U.S. forces' Kadena Air Base in Okinawa Prefecture, which is said to be the biggest of all U.S. airbases in the Far East when it comes to the scale of aircraft and troop deployment.

It is clear that there will be even more serious noise damage and more crimes. The Japanese and U.S. governments plan to move U.S. carrier-borne fighter jets from the U.S. Navy's Atsugi base in Kanagawa Prefecture to Iwakuni. They made several thousand airstrikes in the Iraq war. Iwakuni is going to be reinforced further as an outpost to threaten global peace.

To begin with, what triggered the mayoral election? It was because the central government has cut 3.5 billion yen in subsidies to Iwakuni for use in the construction of a new city hall, the aim being to force Ihara to cave in. In May 2006, the Japanese and U.S. governments agreed on the U.S. military realignment. Before that, the government had decided to subsidize Iwakuni City's new office building project. Ihara presented his city government's budget proposal to the city's municipal assembly as often as five times. However, the city's municipal assembly rejected it every time with a majority of votes from pro-redeployment members. Ihara therefore chose to resign as mayor, and he is running in the election to ask again for the judgment of his city's voting population.

The key man who proposed the plan to relocate carrier-borne aircraft to Iwakuni is former Administrative Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya, and the one who unilaterally cut the subsidy was also Moriya. He has been arrested in a bribery case.

"My baby is going to die." With this, a neighbor of the Atsugi base complained about the roaring of Atsugi-based fighter jets. "I thought about doing something about the Atsugi base," Moriya was quoted as saying in the November 2007 issue of Gendai. Moriya then proposed moving the Atsugi-based aircraft to Iwakuni. Moriya also revealed that his U.S. counterpart had said that it was a good idea.

If Moriya really thought to relocate the Atsugi-based carrier-borne fighter jets to Iwakuni for that reason, Iwakuni people may well

wonder if he did not care about the babies in their city.

Moriya gave incentive money to local governments that cooperated on the U.S. military realignment, and he also cut off the government's subsidization of local governments that would not cooperate. "I wonder if it's appropriate to do such a thing." With this, Hiroshima Prefecture's Governor Yuzan Fujita criticized Moriya's way of doing things. Hiroshima Prefecture neighbors Yamaguchi Prefecture.

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"It's strange that a local government raises an objection to national defense." With this, Osaka Prefecture's Governor-elect Tohru Hashimoto spoke for the LDP-backed candidate. "I can't believe he is a lawyer," Ryukoku University Professor Kiichiro Tomino said. It is only natural that Hashimoto came under fire from critics.

In the United States, the southern Florida city of Jacksonville polled its residents in November 2006 over the U.S. Navy's plan to relocate its carrier-borne jets to the city. The poll found that 60 PERCENT of the city's population were against that plan. As a result, the relocation plan was left up in the air.

Based on law-provided authority, a local mayor says things to the government. That is only natural. Yet, there is a candidate that denies it. Can the citizenry of Iwakuni entrust that candidate with its municipal administration? Local autonomy and democracy will be called into question in the election.

(3) Research whaling facing financial pinch

ASAHI (Page 9) (Full)
February 2, 2008

Japan's research whaling is strapped for money. The Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR), an incorporated body for research whaling, failed to pay off its debt in its settlement of accounts for fiscal 2006 (October 2006 through September 2007). The ICR borrowed 3.6 billion yen from the state coffers as an interest-free operating fund. However, the ICR has yet to repay 1.0 billion yen of that loan. Last year, a fire broke out on a whaler. In addition, there was also a fatal accident involving a crewman. Japan's whaling fleet therefore had to suspend operations. Its catch of whales has now decreased. As a result, there was a drop of 20 PERCENT in the marketing of whale meat. This is the immediate cause of the ICR's failure to pay off its debt. However, there are some other factors behind that. The ICR recently increased its whale catch, which resulted in adding to the cost of running the whaling fleet. In addition, the market prices of whale meat products during 2005 - 2005 dropped greatly.

The 3.6 billion yen was obtained as a short-term loan from the Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation (OFCF), an incorporated body under the jurisdiction of the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry. The ICR borrowed the money at the beginning of FY2006, intending to pay it back at the end of the fiscal year. But it could not completely pay it off, and is now going to repay the remaining 1.0 billion yen in four-year installments from FY2007.

The OFCF's lending is funded from the state coffers. In a way, the OFCF's interest-free loan to the ICR is tantamount to the government's de facto funding of the ICR. The ICR's borrowing from the OFCF began in fiscal 2001, along with the whaling fleet's increased catch. The ICR first borrowed 1.2 billion yen from the OFCF that fiscal year. However, the ICR borrowed more money from the OFCF as the catch of whales increased. In the past, the ICR used to borrow money from the private sector. Interest rates, however, have been so high that the ICR has given up.

The ICR increased its Southern Ocean whaling durning 2005-2006 from the initially planned catch of 440 whales to 850. The increase was intended to step up its ecological survey of whales. The ICR also increased its market supply of whale meat by a little over 30

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PERCENT . There is no need for the ICR to make a profit since it is a public undertaking, so it cut the prices of whale meat products by 20 PERCENT on average. As a result, the market turnover of whale meat was down about 6 PERCENT from the preceding year.

Meanwhile, the cost of whaling rose 10 PERCENT , mainly because the ICR increased its whaling fleet from 5 whalers to 6. In addition, the time devoted to research whaling has been prolonged. "I think we probably lowered the whale meat prices too much," one of the ICR's officials noted.

The ICR posted a deficit of 700 million yen in its fiscal 2006 settlement of accounts. In usual years, the ICR used to have a surplus of double-digit million yen to pay back into the state coffers. In FY2006, however, the ICR had no surplus at all. The Fisheries Agency's Long-Distance Fisheries Division, which oversees research whaling, and ICR officials attributed the deficit to the outbreak of a fire on a whaler and other unexpected troubles that took place last year. "If we get back to the normal pace," one ICR official said, "we will restore the balance."

However, U.S. and other foreign environmentalist activists have been standing in the way of Japan's research whaling this year, as well. Japan has therefore stopped whaling for now. If this is prolonged, the market will have less whale meat supply. As a result, the ICR's balance could go from bad to worse.

(4) Obstacles to investigative cooperation between Japan, China in case of poisoning outbreak caused by tainted Chinese dumplings

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Full)
February 6, 2008

A number of people fell sick after eating Chinese frozen dumplings that were found later contaminated with the pesticide methamidophos. Meanwhile, another organic phosphorus pesticide, dichlorvos, was also detected in a package of frozen dumplings yesterday. Police are increasingly of the opinion that the product was contaminated with the pesticide in China. Given this, investigative cooperation with Chinese authorities is indispensable, but there are a number of problems lying ahead.

A senior police officer said: "Instead of just pushing ahead with investigation, we would like to make arrangements so that our nation will be able to take proper steps." The officer indicated that they are aiming to uncover the main cause of the incident and to hammer out preventive measures, in addition to the major goal of identifying suspects through investigations. Further, police have decided to disclose new pieces of information on poisoned frozen products in a positive manner.

Police have adopted such a policy because investigations are now being carried out both in Japan and China. It is also because, like the methamidophos case, they now judge that the product in question is likely to have been contaminated with the chemical during the process of producing and packaging in China.

At the outset of a meeting yesterday on joint investigation held by the National Police Agency yesterday, Criminal Affairs Bureau Director General Tsuyoshi Yoneda emphasized: "It is necessary for us to cooperate with China. We have already started coordination to work together with Chinese public security investigation

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authorities." Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Liu Chien-chao also said in a regular press conference yesterday: "The Chinese side will positively study (investigative cooperation) if it contributes to clearing up the cause of the incidents." But there are various obstacles stand in the way of cooperation.

The governments of Japan and China signed last December a treaty on Japan-China investigative cooperation to enable their investigators to exchange information without diplomatic intermediaries. But the approval procedures needed in the Diet have yet to be taken, so the treaty has not yet come into effect. Both sides have to carry out

ineffective investigations through diplomatic channels in the conventional way. The two countries cooperated in investigating a case in which four members of a family were killed by a Chinese man in Fukuoka in 2003. In the current case, however, it is suspected that a toxic substance was intentionally mixed in with the food product in China, so a senior policy officer voiced skepticism of the effect of joint investigation, saying: "I wonder to what extent Chinese authorities will disclose to Japan information disadvantageous to their country."

In China, investigators hear circumstances from local employees at Tianyang Food Processing, which produced the dumplings in question, and check the manufacturing, packing, and shipment process. The National Police Agency intends to give priority to domestic investigations for the time being, even while keeping in mind also the possibility of dispatching its investigators to China. One agency official said: "It will be meaningless even if investigators go to China before carrying out a thorough investigation in the nation."

(5) DPJ lawmakers alarmed at leadership's decision to relegate to Ozawa Muto's promotion to BOJ governor

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged slightly)
February 6, 2008

Fierce bargaining is underway in the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) regarding the selection of the next Bank of Japan governor. Although the party leadership has relegated the matter to President Ichiro Ozawa with an aim of avoiding internal confusion, some in the party are highly alarmed at the prospect of Ozawa joining hands with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda. The matter is complicated because there is strong opposition in the working group responsible for the matter to the option of promoting Deputy Governor Toshiro Muto, a former administrative vice-finance minister, to the top BOJ post.

The DPJ, which has become the largest party in the House of Councillors, has established a subcommittee to study government proposals on key positions requiring Diet approval. The panel is chaired by Yoshito Sengoku, a former chairman of the Policy Research Committee. Under the system, the committee is required to report its results to an executive meeting for a final decision.

The leadership, however, has adopted a policy course of making a decision on the appointment of the BOJ governor that would disregard the subcommittee. Ozawa, Deputy President Naoto Kan, Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama and another party executive met on Jan. 18 and decided to relegate the matter to Ozawa. In order to avoid a vacuum in the BOJ governorship, they recognized the need to iron out differences in views by receiving informal plans from the government

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in advance.

When the subcommittee met on Jan. 31, many members voiced their discontent, one saying, "The four executive officers have no authority to leave the matter to the party president." The subcommittee again met on Feb. 5 and set a policy course of following a set of procedures. They fear that if Ozawa negotiates the matter with the prime minister, even through a third party, a rehash of the grand coalition fiasco might follow.

The party leadership will not allow the subcommittee to take the lead because Sengoku and others are negative about Muto's promotion, calling for the separation of fiscal and monetary policies. Subcommittee member and Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Susumu Yanase even said in a press conference on Feb. 1: "Separating fiscal and monetary policies is the party's policy."

If Muto is the only one recommended by the government, chances are that the subcommittee will convey its disapproval to an executive meeting. If Ozawa rubber-stamps it, the party might then be held responsible for causing a vacuum in the governorship. Ozawa needs a convincing explanation in order to overturn the subcommittee's decision. Unconvincing logic would cause confusion in the party.

Although Kan has urged the government to produce several plans apparently in an effort to bring the matter to a soft landing, the party has yet to come up with a roadmap that would lead to a conclusion of the problem. Meanwhile, Ozawa reportedly told his aides: "The practice of former government officials landing lucrative jobs in the private sector after retirement is not good. Keeping that in mind, I will consider the matter after the proposal comes from the cabinet. Why is everyone making such a fuss over it?"

(6) Investigations into Defense Ministry bribery scandals at final stage; Can prosecutors delve deeper into Defense Ministry bribery scandals?

SENTAKU (Page 98) (Full)
February 2008

The special investigation squad of the Tokyo Public Prosecutors Office is now at the final stage of its investigations into political circles in connection with the Defense Ministry's corruption scandals. The special investigation task force, which released former Administrative Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya on bail, after having indicted him twice, has now put all its prosecutors into Moriya's channels of communication to political circles. A source familiar with the prosecutors said:

"The aim of the investigations is to shed light on vested interests connected with Okinawa. Over projects on the relocation of U.S. Marine Corps Futenma Air Station, House of Representatives member Mikio Shimoji, who is from Okinawa, has been at odds with successive defense chiefs, including Fumio Kyuma. Prosecutors appear to be thinking that in order to shed light on this, it is necessary for them to investigate the full picture of the vested interests problem."

In late last year, the special investigation squad called a senior Okinawa Defense Bureau official in question to the Tokyo Public Prosecutors Office. A source familiar with the public prosecutors

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office said:

"Prosecutors seem to have severely pursued him on such points as his having leaked the draft of the base relocation plan to local companies. Prior to this, the prosecutors and about ten administrative officials went to Okinawa and confirmed that the senior Okinawa Defense Bureau official, Moriya, and Shimoji had held a secret meeting in connection with the alleged leak. Moriya entrusted to Shimoji the tasks of the land reclamation needed for the relocation of Futenma Air Station and the evacuation of the base. The special investigation squad is focusing its attention on the ballooning of the interests held by Shimoji."

The prosecutors also seem to have obtained information from a private secretary to Kyuma, who has been locking horns with Shimoji. They appear to have questioned the secretary about allegations of construction of an incinerator in Okinawa. They have gradually been following the trail that is leading them to the politicians.

However, there appears to be an obstacle to filing charges against the politicians. The source revealed: "Chief Public Prosecutor Tetsuya Ito told Hiroyuki Yagi, chief of the special investigation squad, that the deadline for the investigations should be Feb. 29. Yagi was told that he would be replaced at that time," All eyes are now on the moves in February by the Yagi-led special investigation task force.

DONOVAN